This is a Good Place to Live! Narratives and Counternarratives on Territorial Stigmatization in Harare's Informal Settlements

Elmond Bandauko
Western University, ebandauk@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/awc_abstracts

Part of the Geography Commons

Citation of this paper:
Bandauko, Elmond, "This is a Good Place to Live! Narratives and Counternarratives on Territorial Stigmatization in Harare's Informal Settlements" (2020). Africa Western Collaborations Day 2020 Abstracts. 38.
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/awc_abstracts/38
This is a good place to live! Narratives and counternarratives on territorial stigmatization in Harare’s informal settlements

Elmond Bandauko
“PhD Student, Department of Geography & Environment, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 5C2
Email: ebandauk@uwo.ca

Abstract

As cities of the developing world experience rapid growth of informal settlements, public authorities such as municipalities exert different forms of coercive control using threats of evictions, exclusion, blocked access to urban services and other methods of structural violence. These coercive measures are legitimized through the discursive branding of informal settlements as ‘unregulated, unplanned, disorderly and dangerous’ urban spaces, associated with all forms of urban violence, crime and other social ills. Using data from community focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with selected slum dwellers in Harare, this paper examines how residents of such settlements engage with and resist territorial stigma in a rapidly informalizing city. The findings reveal that slum dwellers resist stigmatizing narratives by constructing counternarratives that frame informal settlements as ‘a good place for the urban poor’, thereby creating a positive image of their neighbourhoods in the context of extreme spatial and socio-economic marginalization. These placed-based narratives are rooted in the shared experiences with informality and associational life in a city where such residents are needed yet unwanted. My conclusion is that while informal settlement residents are explicitly aware of their precarity, transient nature and tenure insecurities, these narratives build strong solidarities to resist state sponsored evictions, arbitrary relocations and other forms of forced displacements.

Keywords: informal settlements, urban margins, Harare, territorial stigmatization, counternarratives